

and the constant demand for money made on the people. As the country paid heavily every year, and no proportionate results were forthcoming, the taxpayer claimed a right to inquire into and direct the expenditure. To this claim the government had to give way, for it depended on the Lower House for its supplies. The parliamentary grant averaged 80,000*l.* a year, out of a total receipt of 100,000*l.*¹

This new policy developed by the Commons in Richard the Second's early years was established on an apparently firm basis in the reigns of the Lancastrian Kings (1400-45). It then broke down altogether, owing to the action of the nobility in the Wars of the Roses (1445-85). The system of retainers proved to be the ultimate fact in politics as well as society in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The real fighting power should reside in a class or classes large enough to represent approximately the interests of the nation, or else in a central government that has the interests of the nation at heart. But in these centuries, it resided, as we have shown, in a number of irresponsible individuals.

Nevertheless the effort of the Commons at the close of the Middle Ages to take measures for the government of the country was not a meaningless failure. They at least prevented systematic corruption. We hear no more in Richard the Second's time of such organised public robbery as that for which the ministers had been brought to book in the Good Parliament. Above all, the idea of government by the representatives of the Commons was so strongly impressed on the mind of the nation in these unfortunate and weary years, that the recollection was never forgotten, the idea was never abandoned. The establishment of the liberties of England in the seventeenth century was largely the result of precedent. The traditions and aspirations of the Lower House were now growing up in a very different state of society from that in which they ultimately triumphed.

The death of Edward the Third ended the tyranny of John of Gaunt. He could no longer be so completely master of England

¹ Sir J. Bamsay, *Antiquary* iv. 208.